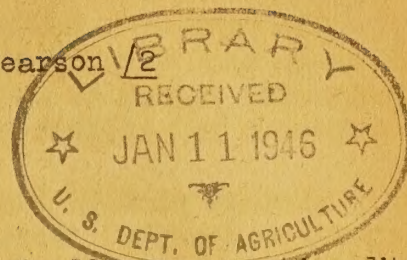


September 13, 1944

REPAIR OF CLOTHING /1

Prepared by Gladys Meloche /2 and Helen Pearson /2

The Background



Wisconsin has a varied group of people. People of virtually every nationality are represented. Germans, French, English, Irish, Swiss, Norwegians, Swedes, Poles, Dutch, Bohemians, Croatians, and others combine to make up the population of this great dairy State. For the most part, they are a thrifty people. For example, the making over of old garments was not a project which developed because of World War II. Wisconsin women had always used their materials repeatedly and made over the clothing of adults for the children or for themselves. Many homemakers knew how to refoot stockings, how to make good, warm home-made mittens, snow suits, coats, suits, and the like.

When our country was thrust into World War II, the women said, "What can we do to help?" The answer was, "Keep right on doing what you've always done, only do a better and bigger job."

Soon the labor situation changed on the farm. Young men were drafted into the military services. Food was needed for the armed forces and for Lend-Lease. To increase the crop acreage, women had to help in the field as well as in the home. Time became a vital factor. Jobs within the home had to be done in the least possible time. Short cuts in sewing were requested.

The shopping situation changed. There was a shortage of materials. What did appear on the shelves and counters was of inferior quality. Some materials that were considered staples disappeared entirely or were sold at such high prices that our women would not buy them. This was not only true in yard goods but of ready to wear garments. Only a short time elapsed before the women said, "Our old materials are so much better than those we can buy, we had better do all we can to save them."

This situation fitted right in with the war program of (1) using what they had on hand, (2) taking better care of what they had, and (3) buying only when a real need arose.

Repair of clothing was suggested as one of the projects that would meet the need aforementioned. Immediately, the women replied, "What can we learn about patching, darning, and mending? We've done this all our life."

/1 One of a series of case histories prepared for use in the Conference To Outline the Contribution of Extension Methods and Techniques Toward the Rehabilitation of War-torn Countries, held in Washington, D. C., September 19 to 22, 1944. Extension Service and Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations, cooperating.

/2 Specialist in Clothing, Wisconsin Extension Service.

Analyzing the Situation

The extension clothing specialists felt that if the women were better informed as to what was included in the subject of repair, they would soon change their minds with regard to its helpfulness. Some way had to be planned to acquaint the women with new subject-matter material and with methods of teaching it to others.

Another problem that had to be considered was whether public-school home-economics teachers, vocational teachers, farm-security workers, and others in the instructional field, needed a review of good repair methods. For the best results, all groups had to work together and give similar subject matter.

The extension group had its organization in every county. No campaign was needed to reach the women. Large numbers of them belonged to home demonstration groups. Members were always encouraged to reach those who were outside of the group. However, leaders selected by these various groups had to be trained. Neighborhood leaders were available in areas not reached by groups.

Three steps then were necessary: (1) To acquaint women with subject matter to be included, (2) To give instructors in all teaching groups the opportunity to be brought up-to-date on subject of repair, and (3) To train leaders to take information back to organized women's groups so that they in turn would take it to every crossroad.

Planning, and Carrying Out the Plans

Extension clothing specialists from every State in the Union had received excellent guidance and help from the Federal office, through regional conferences. This came in the month of August.

By the time schools opened and teachers were back on duty, the two clothing specialists, in cooperation with the resident clothing staff of the University of Wisconsin and the Clothing and Textile Committee of the State Home-Economics Association, were ready to sponsor a 1-day conference. This was in October.

Arousing interest of teachers.

Delegates representing extension; farm security; public, vocational, and parochial schools; and state colleges came from practically every section of the State. The northwestern section was not represented because of the long distance to travel, but arrangements were made to reach this section at a later date. With the exception of the vocational group, teachers paid their own expenses. At this conference the clothing situation was discussed. An exhibit of many types of repair possible was on display. Many were demonstrated. Those who attended were most enthusiastic and said they had received more practical help in that one day than in any convention they had attended.

Acquainting homemakers with subject matter.

Wisconsin was fortunate. Annually a Farm and Home Week was held at the University of Wisconsin located at Madison. This year, eight district Farm and Home Weeks were planned in place of the one State-wide meeting. At each of these district meetings, clothing specialists set up the repair exhibit, gave talks on the clothing situation, and discussed the importance of taking care of materials

in the home. When the women saw the exhibit, they immediately said, "We thought we knew how to patch and darn. When can we get help with this in our county?" The ground work was laid. Interest of teachers in fields, even outside extension, had been aroused in this important subject, and women were shown that repair meant more than setting in a patch.

Training leaders.

To take care of the demands for help from the homemakers, and since that the home demonstration agents would have the major part of this load, district conferences were held for county home agents. At this time, the home agent prepared their demonstration material and actually made the different types of repair that would be of greatest value. The agents went back to their various counties knowing the "how" of patching, mending, and darning.

Instruction in the county was given through project leaders. Each home demonstration group selected two women who received training from their home agent at center meetings and then they in turn went back and demonstrated to their respective groups. The center meetings lasted from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and usually two meetings were held a month apart at each center in order to cover the work thoroughly. The number of centers in a county varied with the number of organized groups. The home agent tried to locate centers so that the project leaders would not have to travel too great a distance, and the number of project leaders would not be too large (12 to 24). In many counties, home agents and leaders prepared exhibits for use in store windows, libraries, etc.

Two types of repair stood out as being very usable. These were the quick patch made by machine and retreading. When feasible, these were given to neighborhood leaders who in turn reached persons in their respective communities. In a few cases both men and women, neighborhood leaders, were instructed. Many suggestions given in repair were carried over into other phases of the clothing project such as made-overs.

Results

The coverage of the State with this particular piece of work was not 100 percent, but was excellent. Everyone seemed to be talking about repair. Even newspapers carried editorials on this project.

Again and again mothers reported time and money saved by repairing an old garment rather than buying a new one of questionable quality and at high price.

Iowa County reported, "These meetings contributed to better family living by giving those who do a poor job of mending a little inspiration to do better one, a lift in helping others to learn the 'how' of mending and by giving the entire family the satisfaction of wearing good-looking mended garments."

Fond du Lac County women reported, "We can put about five patches on overalls in the time we used to spend making one patch by hand, and our husbands and sons don't mind wearing the patched garment now that the patches are inconspicuous."

Washington County reported exhibiting at one club meeting 25 sweaters that had been darned according to suggestions given by leaders.

Sheboygan County wrote, "There wasn't one suggestion given at the repair meetings which didn't bring satisfaction to some member."

From Portage County comes this statement, "The two meetings on repair filled a definite need for all homemakers. Every suggestion was worth while and with overalls hard to obtain and very expensive, we farm women liked the quick machine patch. Most of us have from five to eight pairs in the wash every week."

Outagamie County leaders reported, "We have usually done a fairly good job of repairing garments, but they didn't have much of a professional look. Many garments that had been laid aside as worn out were put into use again by good repair methods."

By the end of this fiscal year (1944-45), every county in Wisconsin, will have had instruction in repair of clothing in one way or another. This means a total of 71 counties instructed.